

43rd ASSEMBLY DISTRICT • ASSEMBLY DEMOCRATIC CAUCUS CHAIR

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For Immediate Release: May 22, 2015

Jorgensen's Journal: SeniorCare Saved, But Work to Create a Better Budget Must Continue

In a democracy, everyone's voice has the power to make a difference.

This month, Wisconsinites raised their voices together, demanding that SeniorCare be saved. My fellow Democrats and I collected more than 14,000 signatures as part of a petition drive in support of the low-cost prescription drug coverage program, and we know that many more people chose to write or call their lawmakers directly on the issue.

That kind of public pressure makes a difference – and I'm happy to report, it has.

Just after we delivered another 500 petition signatures to Joint Finance members, Republicans were forced not only to reject Governor Scott Walker's original plan to push SeniorCare enrollees onto Medicare Part D, but also to back down from their legislative leaders' recent suggestions to cap future enrollment and double annual fees and co-payments.

Let's be clear: this is huge victory for Wisconsin.

SeniorCare saves lives, helping 90,000 people afford their basic day-to-day needs with necessary medications. The average enrollee saves hundreds each year over what their costs would be under Medicare Part D.

And, SeniorCare saves money. Unlike the federal government, the State of Wisconsin can directly negotiate with drug companies for the lowest prices for prescriptions. That bargaining process has been so effective that, in 2009, the average cost to support a SeniorCare enrollee was \$588 a year, less than half the \$1,690 cost to subsidize a Part D participant. The difference accounts for an annual savings for taxpayers of more than \$90 million dollars.

SeniorCare's a no-brainer, in my book. I cannot understand why Gov. Walker or Republicans in power would want to mess with it. The only folks who benefit from changes work at drug companies – and trust me, their pockets are already well-lined.

We shouldn't have had to fight for SeniorCare, but we did. And the important thing is, we won.



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But, we can't pat ourselves on the back just yet. No, our work on this budget is far from finished.

This past week, Republicans concocted a new plan to take \$48 million from our already-struggling public schools, diverting that money to their friends in the private, unaccountable voucher school program.

Republicans are also expected to cut hundreds of millions from our UW System, a move that will mean layoffs, far fewer class offerings, longer wait lists – essentially, a totally different student experience.

While the Republicans' so-called Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation doles out millions in grants and "loans" to businesses that fail to create jobs, they're talking about nickel-and-diming us with new fees on bike and vehicle registration and camping and state park usage.

With a \$2.2 billion deficit of their own design and a disappointing revenue outlook, Republicans are desperate to distract from their disastrous budget. Don't let our win on SeniorCare be that distraction.

Keep writing your legislators. Keep lighting up the phone lines. Keep making your voice heard. Keep making a difference.

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